

Despite numerous calls for action on mine safety legislation in the Committee on Education and the Workforce, this Congress chose to do nothing to improve the safety of miners until a second tragedy—this time at a mine in Kentucky—forced action in the Senate. Now this bill is brought to the floor of the House for a vote, without any chance for members to offer amendments and improve upon the Senate's initial step. The reason offered for this rush to passage is that action is needed immediately to ensure the safety of miners. Immediate action is needed. Immediate action was needed in January, following the tragedy at Sago. Action was needed over the past 5 years as the administration withdrew or delayed action on 18 different mine safety rules. We do need to act now. But in our haste to improve safety we should take the time to ensure we do things right.

It is clear this bill will in fact improve mine safety. The Senate bill will improve the tracking and communications devices used in mines, increase penalties for noncompliance and improve mine rescue team operations. It is a good step, but we can and should do more. We should use the lessons learned from Sago and take the steps to ensure other miners do not suffer the same fate.

My colleague, Congressman MILLER, has proposed three simple and necessary amendments to this bill that would do just that. These amendments would require random testing of self-rescue devices by MSHA to ensure these vital devices are functional when needed. They would require a minimum of 2 days worth of air for trapped miners. And they would shorten to 15 months the time period for mines to install technology to track and communicate with miners underground. These are simple changes, which miners and the mine industry in West Virginia have already agreed are necessary as a part of the West Virginia Mine Safety Technology Task Force. Miners at the Sago mine and other West Virginia mines will now be protected from the problems that led to the death of those 12 miners earlier this year, not because of the bill we are debating today, but by State law. Miners across the Nation deserve and require those same protections. Passage of this bill, without such amendments, gives false hope to the families of miners in other States that a Sago-like disaster will not befall their loved ones in the future.

The core mission of MSHA is to protect workers by enforcing safety standards. These workers are not the bosses who decide if and how a business will obey the law. Instead they face the consequences of those decisions. They need strong workplace safety laws and vigorous enforcement, and that is what this Congress should be focused on providing. We do a great disservice to workers by ignoring the resources that would offer them greater protections. I urge my colleagues to consider the additional improvements we can and should make for the safety of miners across the Nation. We must refocus our time and efforts toward protecting workers.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. TOM UDALL

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 9, 2006

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 223, had I been present, I would have voted "no."

On rollcall No. 224, had I been present, I would have voted "no."

On rollcall No. 225, had I been present, I would have voted "no."

On rollcall No. 226, had I been present, I would have voted "yes."

CONGRATULATIONS TROY McCURRY

HON. JOE WILSON

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 9, 2006

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize Troy McCurry, a native of Augusta, GA, and a graduate of the University of Georgia. Throughout the past 3 years, Troy has helped me serve the Second Congressional District. From working with legislative aides on special projects to helping communicate with citizens throughout South Carolina, he has been an important part of our team. I have truly appreciated his service and his commitment.

A graduate of Catholic University Law School, Troy recently accepted a position with the Republican Governors Association. I am confident that he will bring the same level of professionalism and commitment to his new job. As Troy begins the next stage of his career, I would like to sincerely thank him for his efforts.

RETIREMENT OF TOM DELAY

HON. JOHN ABNEY CULBERSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 9, 2006

Mr. CULBERSON. Mr. Speaker, today marks the final day in Congress for one of the greatest leaders the House of Representatives has ever seen. In his 22 years of public service to the residents of the 22nd District of Texas, TOM DELAY has always been a tireless and indispensable warrior for the Republican party and the causes of individual freedom, family values, and limited government.

Tom's years of service have been marked by devoted adherence to core conservative principles. His effectiveness can be measured in the countless advances made under his leadership strengthening our national security, restoring individual freedoms, and reigning in a runaway federal government. Tom never backed down from his beliefs and principles, and ultimately his tremendous success made him a target. There is no doubt that the Republican Party, the conservative movement, the state of Texas, and especially the Houston area have lost the services of a great friend and leader.

I will miss having TOM DELAY serving with me in the House, but I am grateful that he has

chosen to remain active in the fight to restore the American Republic. I look forward to continuing to benefit from his invaluable counsel and wisdom.

On behalf of the Houston area and on behalf of my fellow Republican House members, congratulations to a fine leader, a great friend, and a devoted husband and father on a job well done.

FREEDOM FOR ARMANDO BETANCOURT REINA

HON. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 9, 2006

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about Armando Betancourt Reina, a political prisoner in totalitarian Cuba.

Mr. Betancourt Reina is an independent journalist and has been a chronicler of truth amid the lies and deceit of Castro's villainous regime. Mr. Betancourt Reina works and writes to inform the world about the nightmare that is the Castro regime. Unfortunately, writing and reporting the truth is not allowed under Castro's tyrannical dictatorship. All attempts to portray the absolute lack of freedom in totalitarian Cuba are viciously attacked and their authors are imprisoned and harassed.

According to Directorio and the Committee to Protect Journalists, Mr. Betancourt Reina was detained on May 23, 2006, in the city of Camagüey where the police were carrying out violent evictions. He was covering yet another atrocity committed by the regime against the Cuban people. In an attempt to suppress the truth about these violent evictions from the world, Castro's thugs arrested and imprisoned Mr. Betancourt Reina. Mr. Betancourt is locked in the totalitarian gulag, but he has not yet been charged with a "crime."

I remind my colleagues that, under Castro's totalitarian regime, any freedom of the press, any effort to display the atrocities of the regime under the spotlight of truth, is met with swift and violent repression.

Let me be very clear, Mr. Betancourt Reina is currently languishing in the depraved conditions of the totalitarian gulag for his truthful articles. The U.S. State Department describes the conditions in the gulag as, "harsh and life threatening." The State Department also reports that police and prison officials beat, neglect, isolate, and deny medical treatment to detainees and prisoners. It is a crime of the highest order that people are imprisoned in these nightmarish conditions simply for reporting the facts.

Mr. Betancourt Reina is a brilliant example of the heroism of the Cuban people. Despite incessant repression, harassment, incarceration and abuse, he remains committed to the conviction that freedom of the press and democracy are the inalienable right of the Cuban people. Let us never forget and always support those who are struggling to liberate people from the grip of tyranny.

Mr. Speaker, it is as inconceivable as it is unacceptable that, while the world stands by in silence and acquiescence, independent journalists who write the truth about totalitarian regimes are systematically tortured. My colleagues, we must demand the immediate and